

# 2016

BRYAN MURPHIE, Wildlife Biologist



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



## **DISTRICT 15 HUNTING PROSPECTS**

Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISTRICT 15 GENERAL OVERVIEW .....	1
ELK .....	2
General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status .....	2
Which GMU Should Elk Hunters Hunt? .....	4
What to Expect During the 2016 Season .....	4
Elk Areas .....	7
Notable Hunting Changes .....	7
Bacterial Hoof Disease .....	7
DEER.....	9
General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status .....	9
Which GMU Should Deer Hunters Hunt? .....	10
What to Expect During the 2016 Season .....	10
Deer Areas .....	14
Notable Hunting Changes .....	14
MOUNTAIN GOAT .....	14
General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status .....	14
Notable Hunting Changes .....	15
BEAR .....	15
General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status .....	15
What to Expect During the 2016 Season .....	16
Notable Hunting Changes .....	17
COUGAR .....	18
General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status .....	18
What to Expect During the 2016 Season .....	18
Notable Hunting Changes .....	19
DUCKS.....	19

Common Species .....	19
Population Status .....	20
Harvest Trends and 2016 Prospects .....	20
Public Land Opportunities .....	20
GEESE.....	20
Common Species .....	20
Population Status .....	20
Harvest Trends and 2016 Prospects .....	21
Public Land Opportunities .....	21
FOREST GROUSE .....	21
Species and General Habitat Characteristics.....	21
Population Status .....	21
Harvest Trends and 2016 Prospects .....	21
PHEASANTS .....	22
QUAIL.....	22
TURKEYS.....	22
BAND-TAILED PIGEONS .....	23
General Description .....	23
Population Status and Trend .....	23
Harvest Trends .....	23
Where and How to Hunt Band-Tailed Pigeons.....	23
Special Regulations.....	24
OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES .....	24
LAND ACCESS .....	24
General Information.....	24
Basic Access Rules .....	24
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU .....	25
PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM .....	27

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS .....	27
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## DISTRICT 15 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 15 is located in Region 6 and consists of all or portions of six game management units (GMUs): 621 (Olympic), 624 (Coyle), 627 (Kitsap), 633 (Mason), 636 (Skokomish), and 651 (Satsop). A portion of GMUs 621 and 624 fall within District 16. Administratively, District 15 includes Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties, and is one of four districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that collectively comprise the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Region 6.

The landscape in District 15 is dominated by industrial forest land, and the most common habitat is characterized by multi-aged forests consisting primarily of Douglas fir and red alder. However, other habitats do occur, ranging from alpine in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to marine in the Hood Canal and Puget Sound.

A range of hunting opportunities are available in District 15, including elk, deer, bear, cougar, mountain goat, waterfowl (including sea ducks), and grouse. Also, a variety of small game species like rabbit, quail, coyote, and bobcat are present. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest for most game species in District 15 during the 2015 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2014 season and the five-year average. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

**Table 1.** Estimates of the 2014, 2015, and 5-year average annual harvest for most game species hunted in District 15 are shown. Waterfowl and small game harvest totals were tabulated from all of Mason, Kitsap, and Jefferson counties.

Species	Harvest		
	5-year avg.	2014	2015
Elk	30	34	34
Deer	1,667	1,660	1,918
Bear	80	61	64
Cougar	9	10	6
Ducks	6,718	5,164	5,387
Canada Goose	367	466	204
Snipe	8	24	0
Grouse	2,604	2,257	2,739
Mourning Dove	158	0	0
Quail	111	12	397
Snowshoe Hare	6	0	11
Cottontail Rabbit	95	54	102



## ELK

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

All elk in District 15 are Roosevelt elk. District 15 contains those portions of the Olympic elk herd occurring in GMUs 621, 624, 633, 636 and 651. GMU 627 is not included in any elk herd plan and no known elk herds are currently in this unit or GMU 633. The quality of elk hunting in District 15 can generally be described as fair. GMU 651 provides the only general season elk hunting opportunity in the district, while elk hunting in GMUs 621 and 636 are by permit only. Elk in GMU 624 primarily reside near the town of Sequim in District 16. GMU 651 is managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk numbers while also minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops. GMUs 621 and 636 are managed with the primary goal of increasing elk numbers while also minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops. Management of the Sequim herd in GMUs 621 and 624 is primarily based on minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops.



Elk in the District 15 portion of GMU 621 can primarily be found along the main river valleys, including the Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma Hamma, North Fork Skokomish rivers and near Lilliwaup Swamp. Elk in the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers either remain in the lower river valleys and on adjacent valley ridges year round or migrate to summer range in Olympic National Park. The Hamma Hamma and Lilliwaup herds are generally non-migratory. The

North Fork Skokomish herd is primarily resident to the upper North Fork Skokomish River valley in Olympic National Park above Lake Cushman, often wintering near the northern end of Lake Cushman before migrating to summer range in the Mount Skokomish Wilderness. GMU 621 was closed to all elk hunting in the mid-1990s for conservation reasons and is now open to hunting by permit only. There is not a good estimate for elk abundance in GMU 621. However, based on herd counts and the increase in elk damage/conflict reports, the department is probably at or near the management objective for this unit.

Elk in GMU 636 can primarily be found in the upper Wynoochee River valley, the Skokomish River valley, and near the town of Matlock. Although some herds remain non-migratory, migratory movement has been documented from the upper Wynoochee to Olympic National Park and the North Fork Skokomish River at Lake Cushman, as well as movement up the South Fork Skokomish river valley into Olympic National Park. GMU 636 was closed to all elk hunting in the mid-1990s for conservation reasons and later opened on a limited basis to hunting by permit only. Although there is not a current estimate, anecdotal data suggests the elk population in GMU 636 is likely below management objectives overall, but in some cases individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict.

Elk in GMU 651 are distributed across the GMU among roughly 13 non-migratory sub-herds. However, herd size/number remains dynamic. Although we do not have a current estimate, anecdotal data suggests the elk population in GMU 651 is likely below management objectives overall, but in some cases individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict.

The WDFW management goal is to maintain 15 to 35 bulls per 100 cows in the pre-season or 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows in the post-season (WDFW 2015). Ideally, bull ratios would be collected when all age-classes of bulls are freely intermixed with cows, providing the least biased estimate of bull to cow ratios. However, the ability to sight bulls can be influenced by bull behavior. During pre- and post-rut periods, mature bulls are often segregated from cow/calf groups, reducing the likelihood of their detection during aerial surveys. Conversely, during the rut, mature bulls may exclude other bulls from cow/calf groups due to the social intolerance of rutting bulls toward each other. Consequently, bull to cow ratios collected during pre- and post-season surveys are likely minimum estimates. Bull to cow ratios in District 15 have been at or below management objectives in recent years, averaging 38:100 in the fall and 29:100 in the spring for GMU 621, including the Sequim herd, 20:100 and 18:100 in the fall and spring, in GMU 636, and 15:100 and 14:100 cows in the fall and spring in GMU 651.

For more detailed information related to the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters should read through the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report, which is available for download on the department's website or by [clicking here](#).

## **WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?**

Hunting is influenced by multiple factors, including elk abundance, weather, access, hunting pressure, and hunting season regulations. Most elk hunting in District 15 is by permit to minimize hunting pressure or for safety reasons. In 2016, permits are available for all three weapon types to hunt in GMUs 621 (16 bull permits) and 636 (10 bull permits). Most elk hunting in GMU 624 is accomplished through the Master Hunter program targeting the Sequim herd. General season hunting is allowed in GMU 651, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. In 2015, a general late-season muzzleloader elk hunt was added to GMU 651 as part of a statewide increase in muzzleloader hunting opportunities. Although both GMUs 627 and 633 are open for general season elk hunting, hunters should avoid these GMUs, as no recent observations of elk have been reported for these units.

Hunting pressure is lowest in GMU 636 and highest in GMU 651. Many of the elk herds spend a considerable amount of time on small private land parcels often associated with pastures, so access to hunt may be limited in some areas. Further, many local timber companies are requiring an access permit to hunt their timberlands. For hunters looking for areas with the least amount of pressure and little to no private land access issues, WDFW recommends applying for an elk permit in GMU 636 and hunting the upper Wynoochee Valley area or GMU 621 and hunting mostly DNR land near the Lilliwaup Swamp. Both of these areas will require some effort to hunt, as motorized access is often limited, but because of this, the hunting pressure can be lighter.

Tribal hunting occurs in all three GMUs and often accounts for 50% or more of the total elk harvest in District 15 (see Figure 2 below), so the actual hunting pressure in these units is greater than WDFW hunting season statistics and permit levels might suggest.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2016 SEASON**

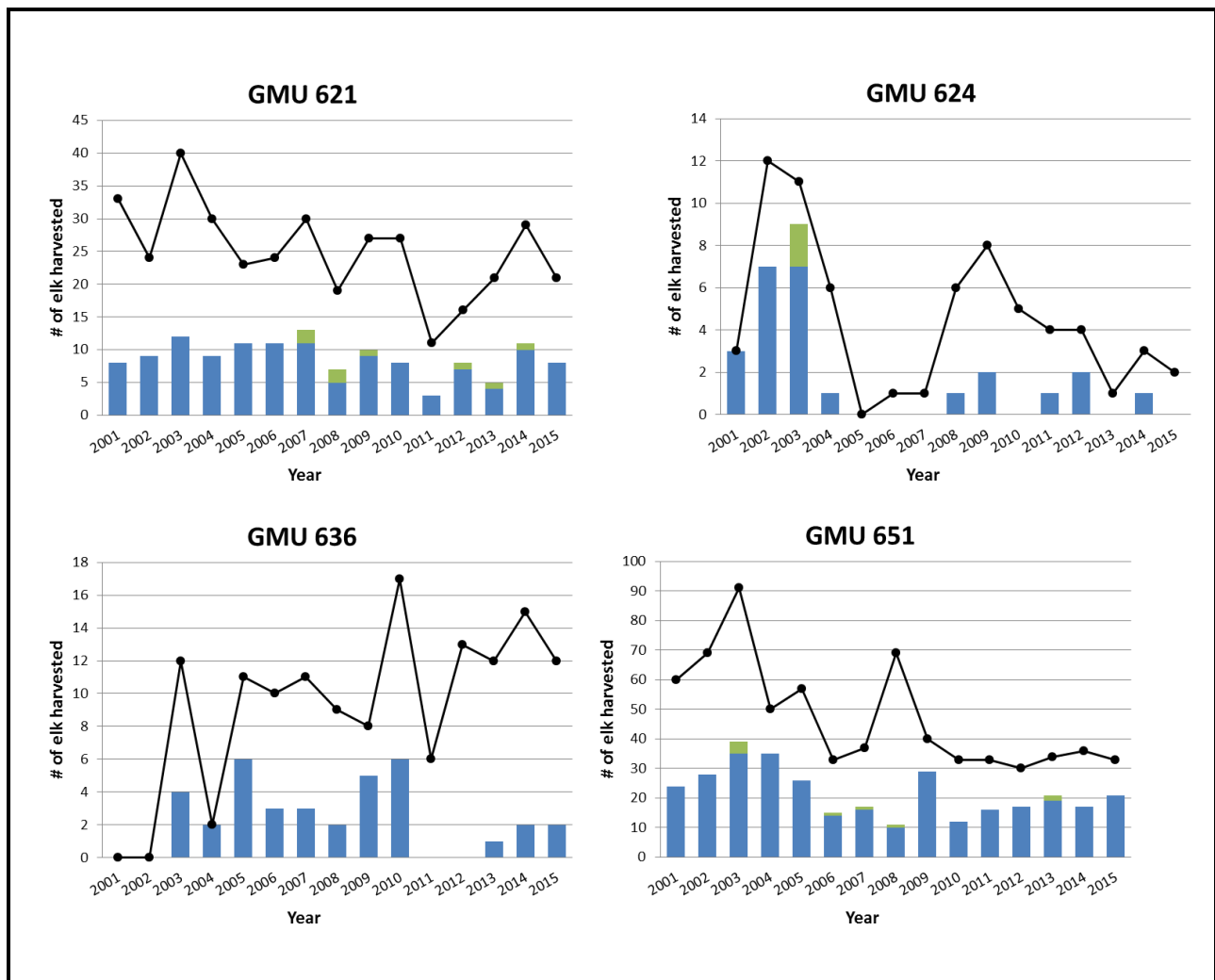
Elk and hunter numbers are not likely to fluctuate dramatically between years. The number of elk permits in GMU 621 for the 2016 season was decreased to 16 from 29 (six archery, two muzzleloader, and eight modern firearm), but the hunt dates were expanded for all three weapon types. Average hunter success in this unit can be a little misleading because of the small permit levels, but five-year averages by weapon type are 21% success for archery, 32% for muzzleloaders, and 36% for modern firearm hunters. Actual success has been reported as low as 0% in some years.

There are 10 permits available for GMU 636 elk hunters (five archery, two muzzleloader, and three modern firearm), and the hunt dates were expanded for all three weapon types. Hunter success in this unit has been quite low, often at 0% for all three weapon types. Rifle hunters generally report the highest success, with a five-year average of 33%.

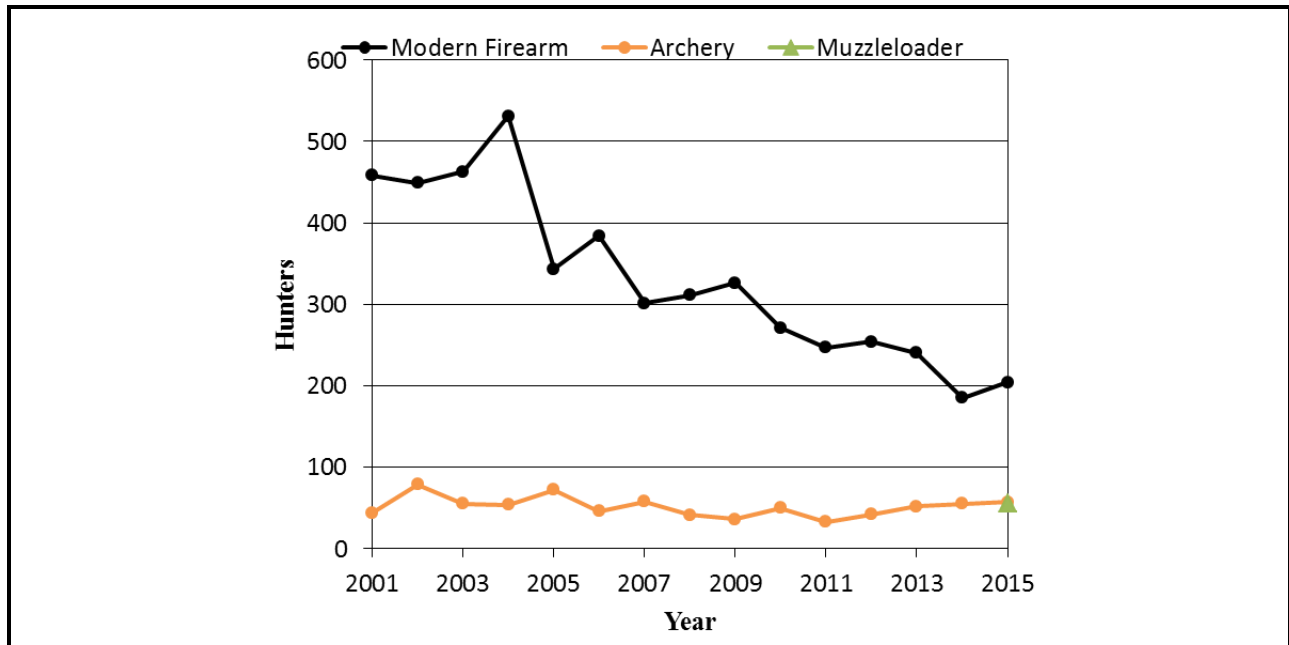
General season hunting during the archery and modern firearm seasons is allowed in GMU 651, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. New in 2015, a late muzzleloader season was added to GMU 651, and the one quality bull permit available to rifle hunters in GMU 651 was dropped.



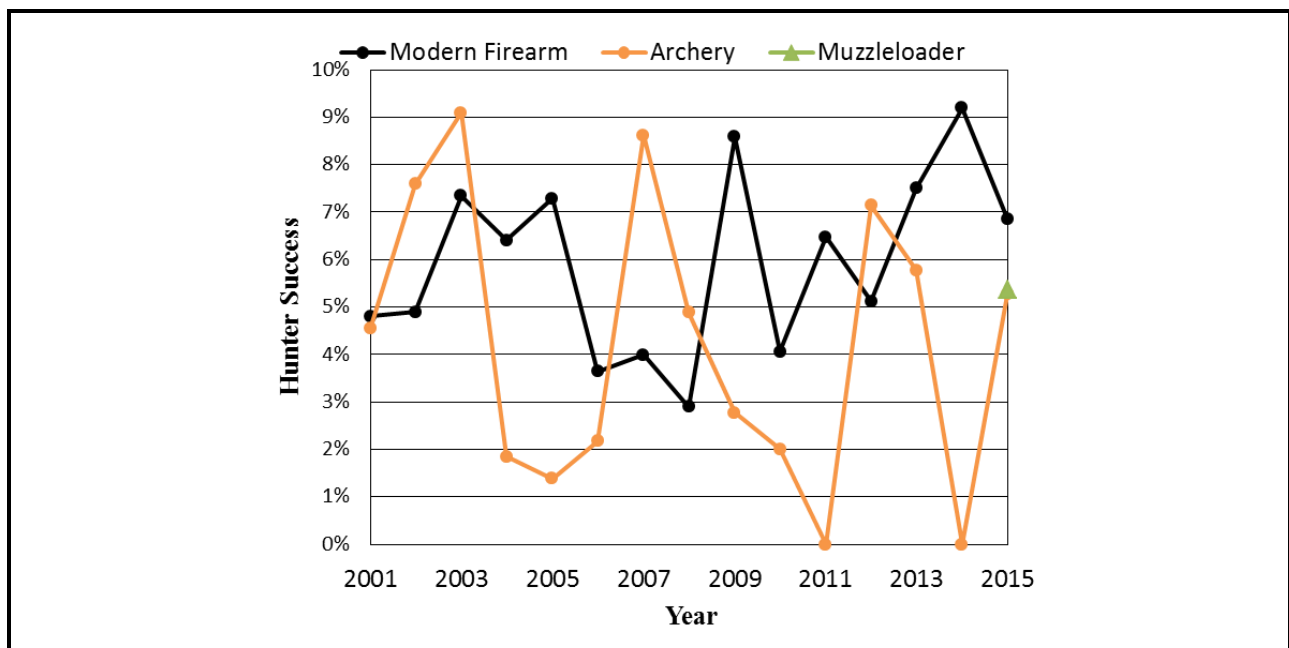
The number of elk harvested in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 is shown in Figure 1, while general season trend data for hunter numbers and success in GMU 651 is presented in Figures 2 and 3.



**Figure 1.** The number of bull (blue) and cow (green) elk harvested during state seasons and total number of elk harvested from all sources (black line) in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 during 2001–2015. Tribal harvest is included in the total harvest.



**Figure 2.** Trends in elk hunter numbers during the general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons in GMU 651, 2001–2015. A general late season muzzleloader hunt was added in 2015.



**Figure 3.** Trends in hunter success rates during general modern firearm and archery elk seasons in GMU 651, 2001–2015. A general late season muzzleloader hunt was added in 2015.

## **ELK AREAS**

There are two Elk Areas in District 15: Elk Area 6061 (Twin Satsop) and Elk Area 6071 (Dungeness). Elk Area 6061 was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic elk damage issues, while Elk Area 6071 was established to limit elk hunting for safety reasons.

Current hunting regulations allow the harvest of 3-point minimum bull or antlerless elk during the general early archery season in Elk Area 6061, while elk hunting in Elk Area 6071 is usually conducted through the Master Hunter program on a limited basis.

## **NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES**

The permit season dates for bull elk permits in GMUs 621 and 636 were extended in 2016 for all three weapon types.

Some private timber companies in District 15 are going to fee access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Hunters should be aware of these changes and are advised to contact landowners in areas they hunt to determine the company's current policy. See the private lands access section for more information.

Of particular note for 2016, the Green Diamond Resources Company signed an agreement with the Squaxin Tribe to limit hunting access to Squaxin Tribal members on a portion of their land within the Kennedy Creek drainage and vicinity in GMU 651. This change will likely have the greatest impact on Elk Area 6061 elk hunters.

## **BACTERIAL HOOF DISEASE**

Over the past decade, WDFW has received a growing number of reports of elk exhibiting hoof deformities in southwest Washington. This condition is characterized by abnormal hoof growth, cavitating sole ulcers and, in severe cases, eventual sloughing of the hoof capsule. Reports have been increasing in number and geographic scope, and hunters are regularly seeing – and sometimes harvesting – elk with this condition. It has been noted in both males and females, old and very young animals, and in any hoof.

In recent years, WDFW has worked collaboratively with five independent diagnostic laboratories and epidemiological specialists on a 16-member panel of researchers and veterinarians to identify the disease and find its cause. All evidence to date points to treponeme infectious bacteria, which appears to be very similar to a disease complex known as digital dermatitis (DD), the most prevalent infectious hoof disease of cattle, and, in some parts of the world, sheep and goats. Although many bacteria play a role in hoof disease, a type of spirochete belonging to the genus *Treponema* is the most common.

Treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) in elk most closely resembles contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) in sheep. There is no evidence that the bacteria are harmful to humans, and tests have shown that the disease does not affect animals' meat or organs.

If the meat looks and smells normal, and if common sense and good hygiene are practiced during the harvesting, processing, and cooking, the meat is most likely safe to eat. Please see the Department's website for more on [Wild Game Meat Food Safety](#).

The primary area of TAHD infection is in the Cowlitz River Basin. However, suspected incidences of hoof disease occur in southwest Washington in 10 counties and the disease affects both the Mount St. Helens and Willapa elk herds. Scientists believe environmental factors are important in disease initiation, and the bacteria likely persist in wet soils and spread to new locations on the hooves of infected animals.

For this reason, WDFW has implemented new regulations requiring hunters to leave the hooves of any elk taken in the affected area on site. See page 66 of the 2016 Big Game Hunting pamphlet for details on the regulations regarding leaving elk feet at the site of harvest in southwest Washington.

Hunters can also help WDFW address this challenging wildlife management issue by reporting elk with hoof disease on the [online reporting tool](#). Hunters who harvest an elk with a collar are asked to call the phone number on the collar as soon as possible so it can be retrieved. This information is important for an ongoing WDFW study on the effects of the disease on survival and reproduction.

## DEER

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) are the only species of deer in District 15. They are managed to maintain productive populations while providing for multiple uses, including recreational, educational, and aesthetic (WDFW Game Management Plan 2008). District 15 includes all or portions of GMUs 621, 624, 627, 633, 636, and 651. Buck harvest is generally any antlered buck, although prior to 2015, the Skokomish (636) GMU was managed as a 2-point or better unit. Antlerless harvest is limited to certain weapon types and/or by permit.

Overlapping with the early archery season, the Olympic Wilderness areas in District 15 are also open to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters during the high buck hunt. WDFW does not have good data to estimate either participation or success during this hunt, but assumes both are quite low in comparison to general season hunting. Harvest is restricted to 3-point minimum bucks.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 15. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort are used as surrogates to a formal index or estimate of population size. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and the agency is currently



evaluating new approaches to monitoring black-tailed deer populations that are independent of harvest data.

For more detailed information related to the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read through the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report, which is available for download on the department's website or by [clicking here](#).

## WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

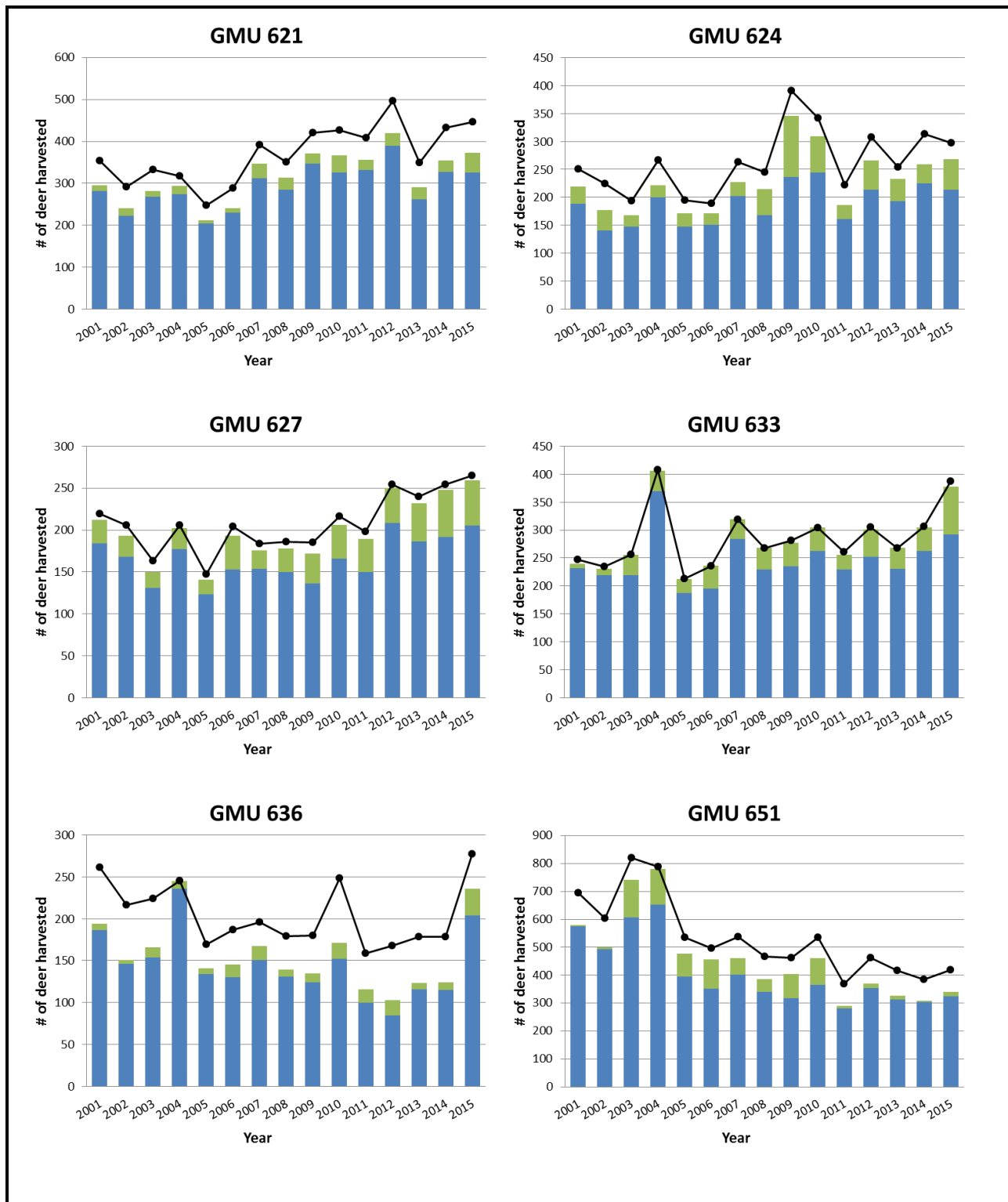
There are ample general season deer hunting opportunities for archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters in District 15 (Table 2). Field observations and recent harvest trends suggest good deer hunting potential exists in GMUs 621, 627, and 633. GMU 651 remains a popular hunting unit, but portions of this GMU owned by Green Diamond Resources will require an access permit. Good deer hunting can be found in lower elevation habitats in GMU 636, but deer density in this unit appears to decline at higher elevations. The department suspects this is largely related to habitat quality and available forage.

**Table 2.** 2016 general hunting seasons and legal deer descriptions for GMUs 621, 624, 627, 633, 636, and 651.

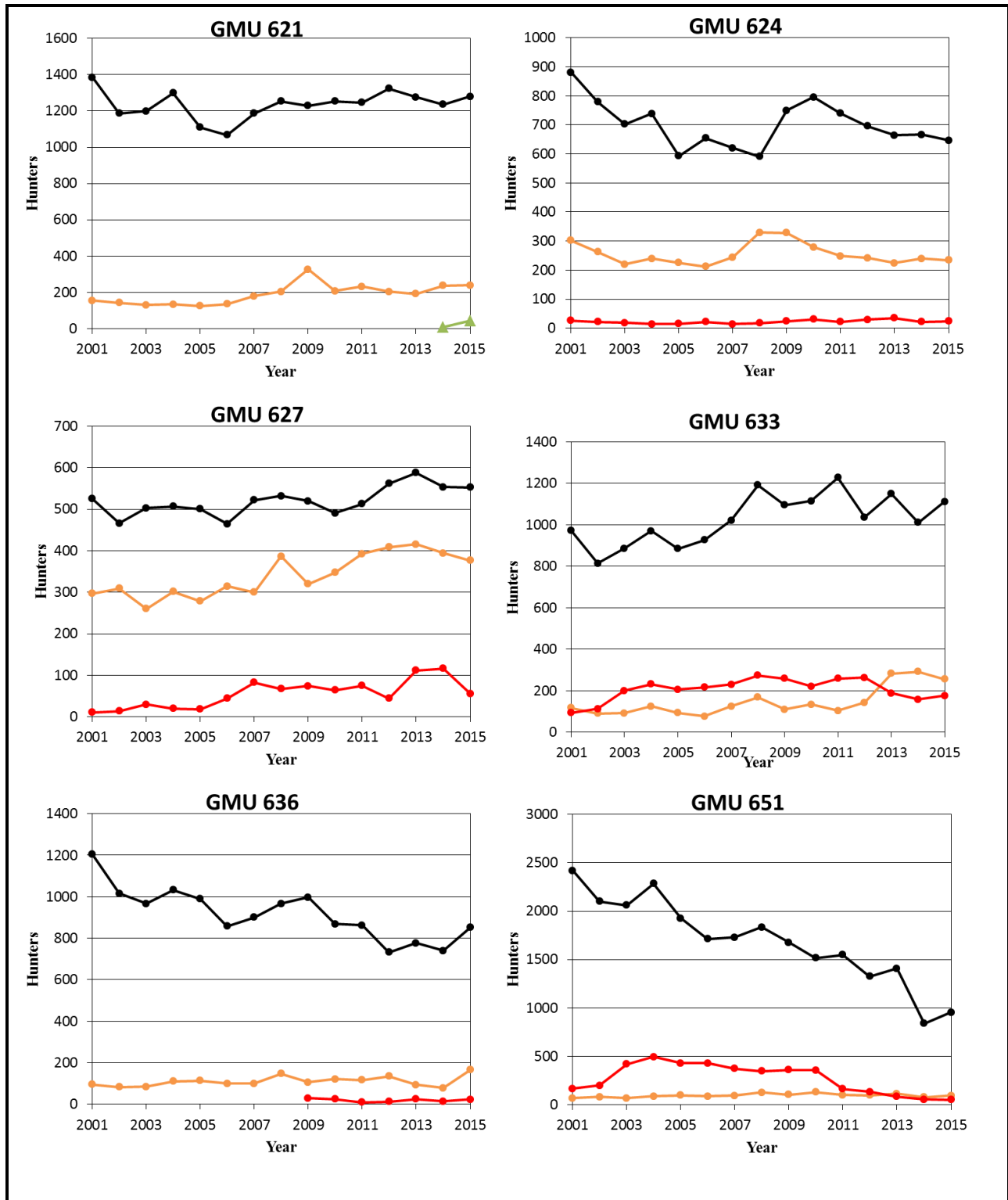
2016 General Deer Seasons						
GMU	Modern Firearm		Archery		Muzzleloader	
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late
621	Oct. 15-31, Any buck	Nov. 17-20, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov 23-Dec 15, Any Buck
624	Oct. 15-31, Any buck	Nov. 17-20, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Nov. 23-Dec 31, Any Deer	Oct 1-9, Any Buck	Closed
627	Oct. 15-31, Any buck	Nov. 17-20, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Nov. 23-Dec 31, Any Deer	Oct 1-9, Any Deer	Closed
633	Oct. 15-31, Any buck	Nov. 17-20, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov. 23-Dec. 15, Any Deer
636	Oct. 15-31, Any buck	Nov. 17-20, Any buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Nov. 23-Dec 31, Any Deer	Oct 1-9, Any Buck	Closed
651	Oct. 15-31, Any buck	Nov. 17-20, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov. 23-Dec. 15, Any Buck

## WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2016 SEASON

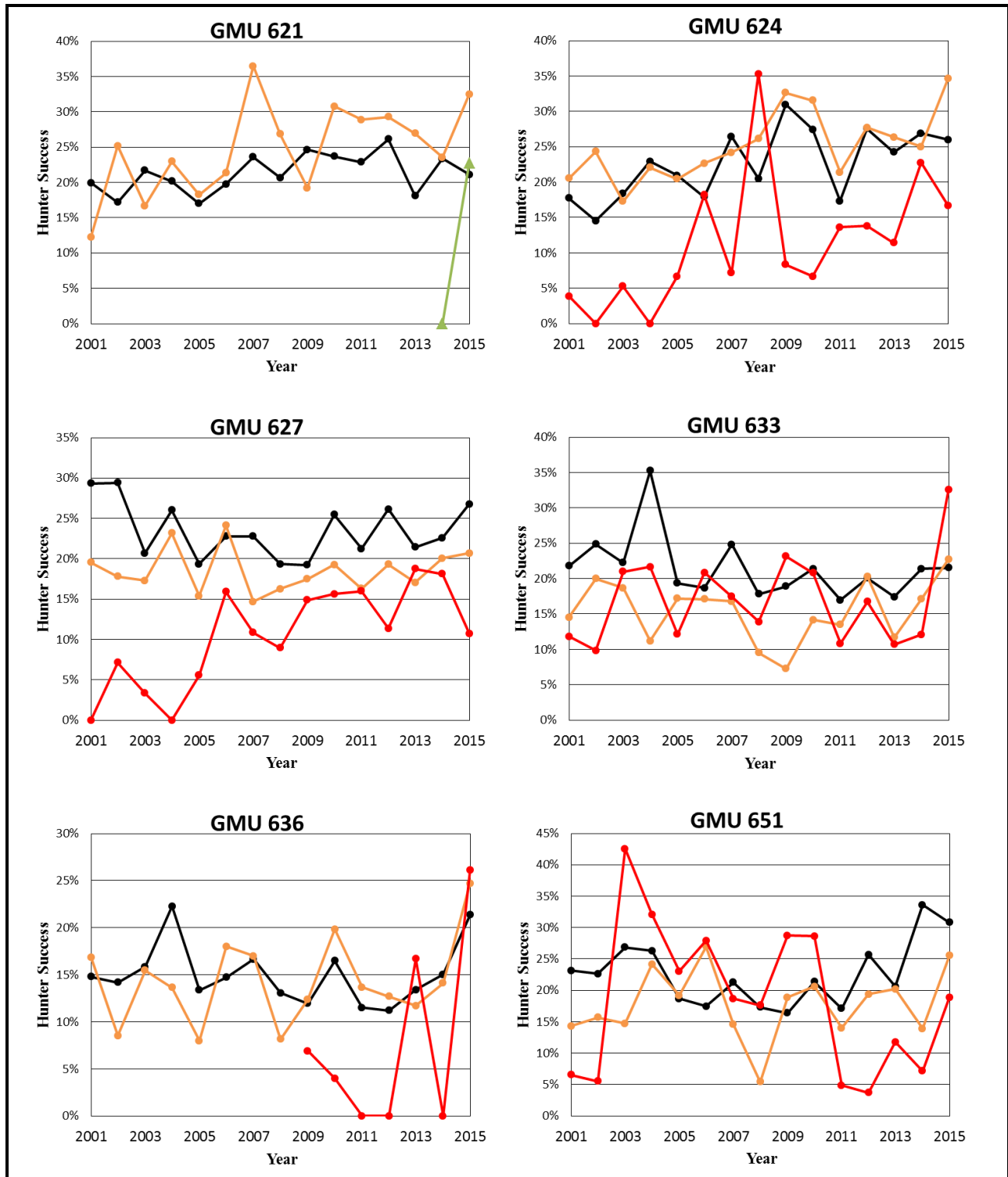
It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 15 where severe winter weather conditions that result in large winter die-offs rarely occur. Hunter numbers also typically do not change dramatically from one year to the next, unless there is a dramatic shift in hunting regulations or access. Consequently, the best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 4 through 6 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 15, as well as what they can expect to encounter with regard to hunter success and hunter numbers.



**Figure 4.** Trends in the total number of buck (blue) and antlerless (green) deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons combined, 2001–2015. Total deer harvest (black line) includes harvest from all sources, including tribal harvest.



**Figure 5.** Trends in hunter numbers during general modern firearm (black), archery (orange), and muzzleloader (red) deer seasons in District 15, 2001–2015.



**Figure 6.** Trends in hunter success rates during general modern firearm (black), archery (orange), and muzzleloader (red) deer seasons in District 15, 2001–2015.

## DEER AREAS

Deer Area 6020 is located in GMU 624 and was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic damage issues. This GMU is open to general season any deer harvest for all three weapon-type user groups. Additionally, 40 second deer permits are available for archery hunters in this area.

## NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

There are very few changes anticipated for deer hunting in District 15; although permit levels for some hunts were adjusted.

Private timber companies in District 15 are going to fee access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Hunters should be aware of these changes and are advised to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the company's current policy. See private lands access section below for more information.

Of particular note for 2016, the Green Diamond Resources Company signed an agreement with the Squaxin Tribe to limit hunting access only to Squaxin Tribal members on a portion of their land within the Kennedy Creek drainage and vicinity in GMU 651.

## MOUNTAIN GOAT

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Mountain goats were introduced into Olympic National Park (ONP) from Alaska in the 1920s (Houston et al. 1994). During the 1980s, Olympic National Park relocated 407 goats to other ranges outside the Olympics. From 1983 until 1997, 119 goats were taken outside the ONP during legal hunting seasons (Jenkins et al. 2012). WDFW closed the Olympic goat hunt in 1997. Since then, the mountain goat population in the Olympic range has rebounded and, in 2011, was estimated to be  $344 \pm 72$  and increasing in ONP (Jenkins et al. 2012). WDFW and USFS conducted goat surveys on the

eastern front of the Olympic range in areas primarily outside ONP, and returned a sightability-corrected estimate of 66 (90% CI: 51-81) total goats in 2012 and 94 (90% CI: 82-112) total goats in 2014.



A permit hunt was established in 2014 with two designated hunt areas in the eastern Olympics, the Brothers and Mount Washington hunt units. A total of six permits were distributed between the two hunt units and two adult nannies were reported taken during these permit hunts in 2014. In 2015, all of the Olympic goat permits were transferred to a new Conflict Reduction Mountain Goat special permit category. Olympic goat hunt units, Mount Washington and the Brothers, were combined into one large unit called the East Olympic Mountains A and B. Six goat permits were offered during the 2015 hunting season divided between two goat seasons: early (Sept. 15 – 25) and late (Sept. 26 – Oct. 5). Of the six permits, five hunters reported hunting and one hunter killed a nanny. Tribal hunting for mountain goats in the Olympics occurs and two billy goats were reported to be harvested in 2015.

## **NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES**

The Olympic goat permit hunts in 2016 will be similar to those in 2015. These permit hunts should be viewed as management hunts, with two principal objectives being to provide recreational hunting opportunity and to reduce goat numbers in areas where conflicts are occurring. As with any mountain goat hunt, hunters can expect rugged, strenuous hunting conditions as they pursue goats in the designated Olympic goat hunt unit. There are very few maintained trails to access many of the areas where mountain goats can be found in this unit, so hunters should be prepared to navigate challenging terrain. And for some areas, the hunt boundary transects right across the mountain top, and goats can easily move between Olympic National Park, where hunting is not allowed, and the permit hunt area. Based on the most recent surveys, the department suggests hunters focus efforts near Mount Ellinor, Mount Washington, Mount Pershing, Jefferson Peak, or the Brothers. Of course, mountain goats may be found in other areas of the goat unit, so consider the above as a starting point for scouting. Very few goats were seen north of Mount Constance in the Buckhorn during the most recent surveys.

Some jumping off points include the Mount Ellinor trail, Mildred Lakes trail, or Jefferson Ridge trail for the Mount Ellinor-Washington-Pershing-Jefferson area, or the Lena Lakes trail for the Brothers area. These are popular hiking trails, so be aware of hikers and be absolutely sure of your target before firing. Roadside observation points can be found at the Mount Ellinor trailhead parking lot, near the parking lot for the Mildred Lakes trail, where the USFS Road 2401 crosses Jefferson Creek, and possibly off the end of USFS 2402 for the Brothers. Please note that the maintained parking areas on USFS lands require a USFS Forest Service pass.

Additional information can be found at [USFS Skokomish Wilderness](#), [Mount Ellinor Trail](#), [Mildred Lakes Trail](#), and [The Brothers Wilderness](#), [Lena Lakes Trail](#), [The Brothers Trail](#), and Washington Trails Association - [Trip Reports](#).

## **BEAR**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS**

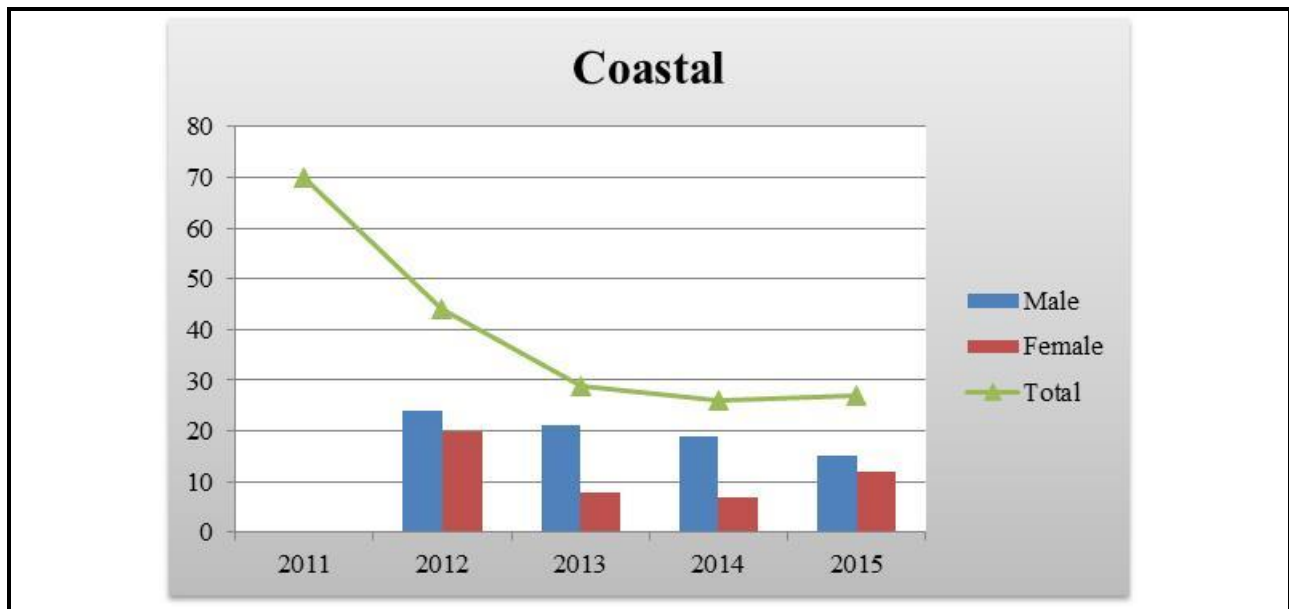
Black bears occur throughout District 15, but population densities vary among GMUs. The best opportunities to harvest a black bear likely occur in GMUs 621, 627, and 636.

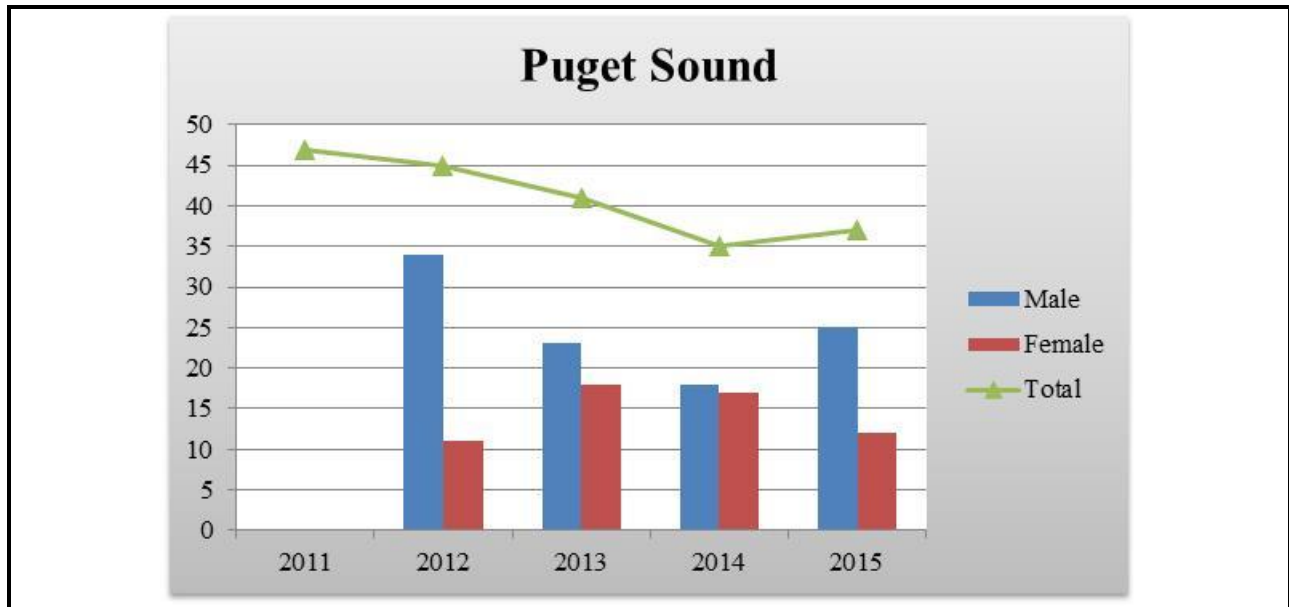
District 15 consists of GMUs part of the Coastal Black Bear Management Unit (BBMU) (GMUs 621, 636, and 651) and GMUs part of the Puget Sound BBMU (GMUs 624, 627, and 633). The current black bear hunting season guidelines for these BBMUs are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The black bear hunting season for all District 15 units is August 1 to November 15, 2016. There were no spring bear hunts in this district. Hunters can purchase up to two bear tags during each license year.

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2016 SEASON

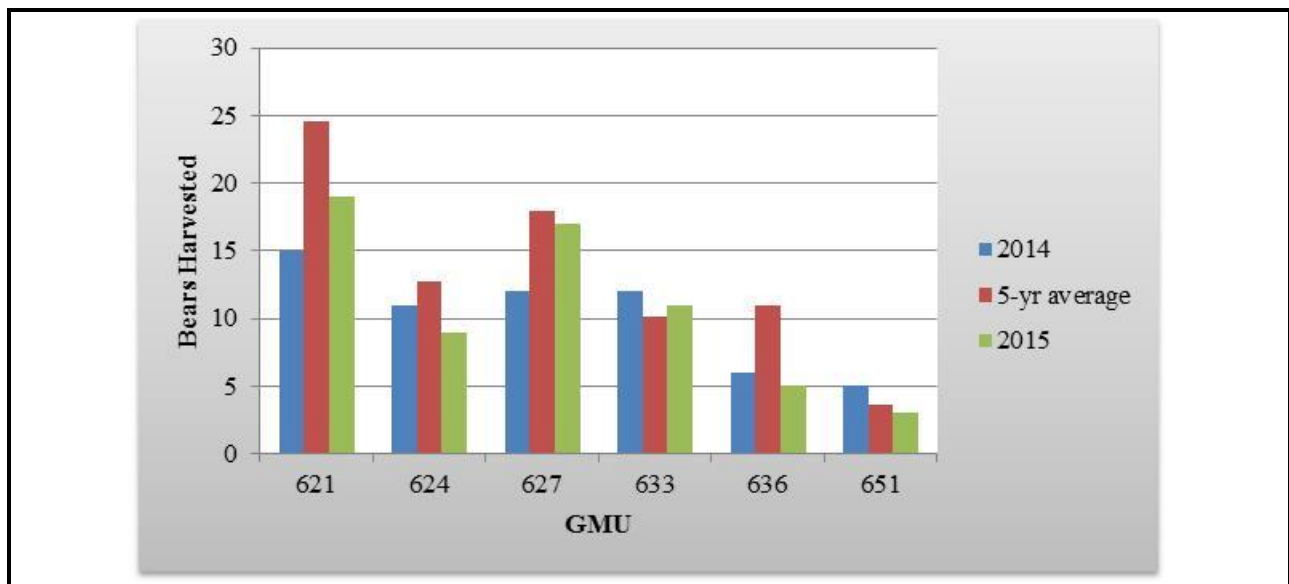
The majority of bear harvest in District 15 comes from hunters killing a bear opportunistically while hunting other species like deer and elk, although some hunters do specifically hunt bears. Hunter success in District 15 has averaged 5% in the Coastal BBMU and 7% in the Puget Sound BBMU over the last five years. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Bear harvest in District 15 increased slightly in 2015 in both the Coastal and Puget Sound BBMUs (Figure 7). At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 621 and 627 (Figure 8). Overall, WDFW expects similar harvest and success rates during the 2016 season.





**Figure 7.** Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 15, 2009–2014. Bears removed for safety reasons are not included. The sex of harvested bears is not available for 2011.



**Figure 8.** The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2014 and 2015 seasons in District 15. Also included is the five-year average for total number of bears harvested in each GMU.

## NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Five spring bear permits were added in both GMUs 627 and 633, with season dates from April 15 thru May 31.

## COUGAR

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 15 and hunting seasons are established with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW changed to a standardized approach for establishing harvest guidelines based on habitat availability and a standard general season. The intent was to have a longer season, without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.



WDFW established a series of hunt areas with standard early season dates of September 1 through December 31 and late season dates from January 1 to April 30, or when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever comes first. Harvest numbers are examined starting January 1, and any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed. Anyone planning to hunt cougar after January 1 is advised to confirm the cougar season is open in the desired hunting area. Harvest guidelines for each hunt area

located in District 15 are provided in Table 3.

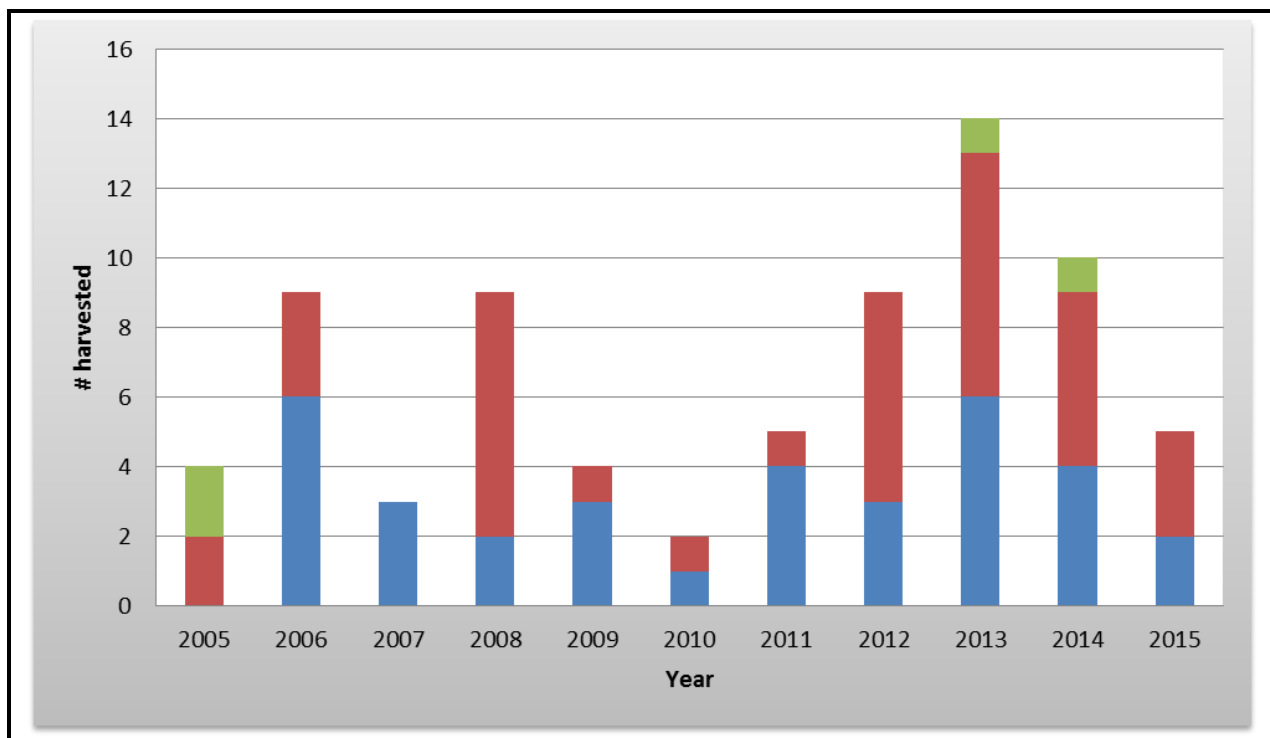
For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit the WDFW's website or [click here](#).

**Table 3.** Harvest guidelines and the reported 2015-16 harvest for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 15.

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline 2016	Harvest Guideline 2015	2015-2016 Harvest
618, 636, 638	4-5	4-5	0
642, 648, 651	6-8	6-8	5
621, 624, 627, 633	None	None	3

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2016 SEASON

Most cougar harvest comes from opportunistic encounters while hunters are pursuing deer, elk, or other activities, meaning total cougar harvest in District 15 can vary from year to year (Figure 9). Since 2005, the number of cougars harvested annually in District 15 has averaged seven.



**Figure 9.** The estimated number of male (blue), female (red), and cougars of undetermined sex (green) harvested in District 15, 2005–2015.

## NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

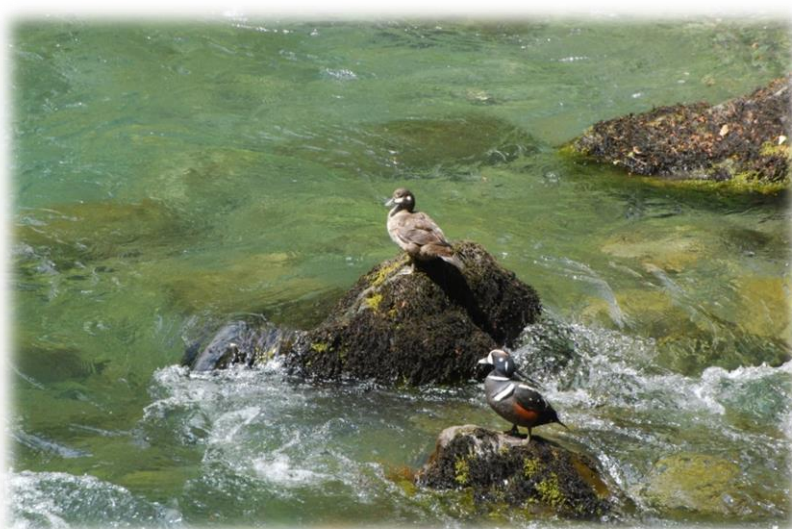
Hunting season and harvest guidelines are similar to 2015.

## DUCKS

### COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks inhabit District 15. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye, are also present on fresh and salt water. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can provide a unique hunting

opportunity. Sea ducks, including scoters, Barrow's goldeneye, long-tailed ducks (formerly oldsquaws), canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks, inhabit Hood Canal and other saltwater areas.





Mallards are the most abundant species of duck in Washington and constitute the vast majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically more than 50 percent). However, the most abundant species of duck in District 15 is American wigeon.

## **POPULATION STATUS**

Although some mallards and wood ducks nest in the district, the number of ducks that occur in District 15 during the hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska. The 2015 breeding population survey estimated the breeding population for mallards in Alaska and Canada was similar to last year, but above the long term average. The numbers of breeding birds in Washington was up 9% over last year and 11% over the long term average. 2016 data was not available at the time this was written.

## **HARVEST TRENDS AND 2016 PROSPECTS**

With an increase in the breeding population in Alaska, hunters should expect great hunting opportunities in District 15 during the 2016 season. As in recent years, hunter success will be largely driven by rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunity in District 15.

## **PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES**

Public hunting access exists at the mouths of the Duckabush, Quilcene and Union rivers. Many of the undeveloped lakes and marshes on the Tahuya Peninsula's DNR land offer an untapped and remote walk-in hunting opportunity for mallards, ringnecks, and scaup. Check the WDFW website for locations and restrictions as the season nears.

Due to extensive residential development on the shorelines, saltwater hunting opportunities are limited, especially in Kitsap County. Always check with the sheriff's department for county shooting closures before hunting.

Also, be sure to check the 2016 Migratory Waterfowl Regulation pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin, and goldeneye) in western Washington [by clicking here](#).

# **GEESE**

## **COMMON SPECIES**

The subspecies of Canada geese most likely to be found in District 15 include western, lesser, Taverner's, and cackler. White-fronted and, occasionally, snow geese can also be encountered. The goose most likely to be harvested is the larger western, which breeds in the district and can be found year around.

## **POPULATION STATUS**

Like ducks, goose numbers in the district are largely driven by weather. The more severe the weather, the more likely the northern subspecies can be seen in area. The local westerns are stable or slightly increasing.

## **HARVEST TRENDS AND 2016 PROSPECTS**

Goose hunting opportunities in District 15 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most geese are taken on private farm fields and securing permission is essential. When funding exists, WDFW biologists attempt to lease fields that regularly attract waterfowl.

## **PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES**

Same as that listed under ducks.

# **FOREST GROUSE**

## **SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS**

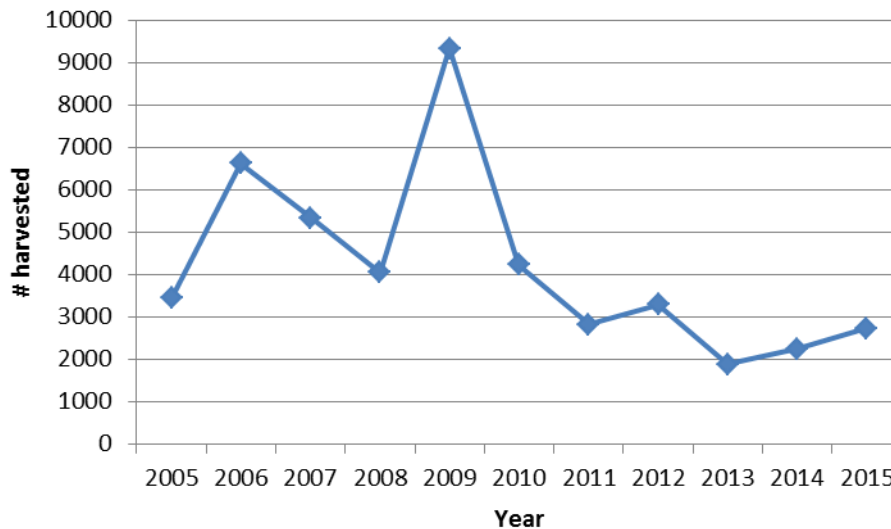
Although grouse occur throughout the district, Mason County offers the most opportunity for the hunter. The Olympic National Forest and Skokomish valley are two of the more popular grouse hunting areas. Blue (sooty) grouse tend to occur in the coniferous forests at higher elevations, while ruffed grouse can occur throughout the district in coniferous and mixed forests. In the fall, either species can be found in clearcuts feeding on berries like salal, Oregon grape, and huckleberry.

## **POPULATION STATUS**

WDFW does not conduct any standardized or formal surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 15. Instead, the department uses harvest data trends as surrogates to formal population estimates or indices of population size. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest per unit effort is the best indicator of population trend. Unfortunately, Jefferson County is split with another district, so getting actual harvest data and hunter numbers from the hunter reports is impossible. However, field observations by district biologists suggest that populations will be similar to last year.

## **HARVEST TRENDS AND 2016 PROSPECTS**

The total number of grouse harvested in District 15 has gradually been declining since 2005 (Figure 10). However, hunter numbers have declined as well, especially over the past few years. There can be several reasons for this, but reduced access to private timberlands has certainly affected hunter participation. Still, hunters should be able to find some excellent grouse hunting in District 15.



**Figure 10.** The reported number of grouse harvested in Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason counties during 2005 – 2015.

## PHEASANTS

There are no viable populations of wild pheasants in District 15. All pheasant hunting opportunities in District 15 are associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program. The primary intent of this program is to provide an upland bird hunting opportunity and to encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites, and three of those sites (Hunter Farms, Belfair, and the Sgt. Mak site) are in District 15. Release site locations can be found at GoHunt on the WDFW website or at the Peninsula Birdhunters Association website at <http://birdhunters.homestead.com/>. The new Sgt. Mak release site near Mason Lake replaced the Grapeview site in 2014.

## QUAIL

Although frustratingly unpredictable, quail in District 15 are most likely to be found in two- to six-year-old clearcuts, under power lines, and in tall stands of scotch broom throughout Mason and Kitsap counties. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird. Locations to try include the DNR parcels on the Tahuya Peninsula northwest of Belfair and the industrial timberlands between Shelton, Matlock, and McCleary. Walk-in opportunities are also numerous on timber company clearcuts around Mason Lake. The time to scout is in the spring and early summer when the males are quite vocal.

## TURKEYS

There are no sizable turkey populations in District 15. The turkeys that can be found in District 15 are eastern wild turkeys. Approximately 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into

southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction programs have been discontinued because populations did not appear to expand and habitat suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were not likely to support viable turkey populations. Occasionally, single birds are spotted, but this district cannot be recommended as a place to bag a turkey.

## **BAND-TAILED PIGEONS**

### **GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are found below 1,000 feet in elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

### **POPULATION STATUS AND TREND**

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 15 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years, but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities. July counts in 2015 showed a slight increase over last year.

### **HARVEST TRENDS**

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 15, and statewide, showed an increasing trend until it declined sharply following the 2009 season. However, this decline in harvest was associated with a similarly sharp decline in hunter numbers, so harvest declines are not believed to be associated with a similarly sharp decline in population size. Harvest in District 15 occurs mostly in Mason County, which averages 48 birds taken per year.

### **WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS**

Often times, band-tailed pigeons congregate in areas with red elderberry, which are typically most abundant in five to ten year old clearcuts. Hunting can be exceptionally good in these areas. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting because it is hard to predict which clearcuts will be used. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites and then sit patiently and wait for shooting opportunities as they occur.

As indicated by the mineral site survey WDFW uses to monitor trends in population size, band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. In addition, they show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. However, many of these sites are difficult to find because they are not abundant and occur in obscure areas. If hunters are lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails are congregating, they will likely have success hunting these locations for years to come.

## **SPECIAL REGULATIONS**

Since band-tail seasons were re-opened in 2002, hunters have been required to purchase a migratory bird authorization, report their harvest using harvest cards, and submit that information to WDFW after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2016 as well. Hunters will have a nine-day season from September 15-23.

Hunters should review the 2016 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons Pamphlet to confirm season dates, harvest reporting, and any other regulation changes.

## **OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES**



Other small game species and furbearers that inhabit District 15 but were not covered in detail include eastern cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, bobcat, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot. Crows are also abundant in District 15.

## **LAND ACCESS**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Although District 15 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities, they do exist on lands administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in all District 15 GMUs. One online resource provided by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office can help identify public lands and can be found [online](#).

The vast majority of hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, in District 15 occur on private industrial forestlands owned by several timber companies, which allow access for hunting under a range of restrictions. See below for GMU specific information on land access and ownership. All hunters are encouraged to check ahead of time to determine if any landowner restrictions apply to the area they plan to hunt.

### **BASIC ACCESS RULES**

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forestlands vary by company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide these rules on their website or will provide them to hunters who call to inquire about access. Hunters are encouraged to follow these basic rules if they find themselves in an area they are not familiar with and are in doubt about specific landowners rules. The following are intended to be a general guideline of the basic access rules commonplace on



many private industrial forestlands. Timber companies may have more or less restrictive rules in place, and it is ultimately the hunter's responsibility to make sure they are familiar with those rules.

- ✓ Respect the landowner and other users.
- ✓ Obey all posted signs.
- ✓ Drive slow with headlights turned on when driving on roads opened to public access.
- ✓ Avoid areas of active logging.
- ✓ No camping, littering, ORVs, off-road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals. An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- ✓ Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors.
- ✓ Private forest lands are usually closed to public access during hours of darkness.

**Failure to obey landowner rules can result in prosecution for trespassing and/or other restrictions from the landowner.**

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions we get from hunters is “What is hunter access like in GMU [enter GMU number]?” Generally, this question is referring to the amount of motorized access and not access in general. It is important to differentiate the two because in general, hunters enjoy a high level of access in all District 15 GMUs. However, the type of access varies between motorized and non-motorized access.

The following rating system was developed for District 15 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have some type of fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit. Each GMU was given a rating of excellent, good, or poor, with the level of access associated with each rating as follows:

- **Excellent** – Most if not all of the main logging roads are open, as well as most of the spur roads.
- **Good** – There is a mix of open and closed roads, with most main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access, but is open to non-motorized access. Private timberlands may require an access permit.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Information is updated when available. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6

office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to hunter access that have not been answered.

#### **GMU 621 (Olympic) – Access rating: Good**

Access in GMU 621 is good for deer hunters and challenging for elk hunters, as most elk are found on lower elevation private lands along the major river valleys. This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, DNR, and USFS. Access to USFS land is generally allowed year round. DNR land is accessible to motorized vehicles or walk-in only in most areas. All private agricultural lands require owner permission to hunt.

#### **GMU 624 (Coyle) – Access rating: Poor**

Other than the resident elk herd in the Sequim area, the Coyle Unit is usually considered a deer area. Although there are scattered timberlands publicly owned by DNR, most forest lands are privately owned. The largest property manager is Olympic Resource Management, which is a division of Pope Resources Company, and information on public access for their lands can be found at [Olympic Resource Management](#). Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle.

#### **GMU 627 (Kitsap) – Access rating: Poor**

The Kitsap Unit is a highly developed deer area, with private property throughout. However, there is still ample hunting opportunity on forest lands. DNR owns a considerable amount of land in the western part of the unit. Olympic Resource Management (Pope) and Green Diamond Resource Company also have holdings here. Information on public access for land owned by [Olympic Resource Management](#) or [Green Diamond Resource Company](#) can be found by clicking the link. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

#### **GMU 633 (Mason) – Access rating: Poor**

The Mason Unit is best known as an area for deer. DNR has forest land throughout, with extensive holdings on the Tahuya Peninsula. In the Mason Unit, most of the deer hunting occurs on private property controlled by the [Green Diamond Resource Company](#) and the [Manke Lumber Company](#). Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

#### **GMU 636 (Skokomish) – Access rating: Good**

This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, and USFS. Elk in this unit are generally found on the lower elevation private agricultural or timberlands. [Green Diamond Resource Company](#) is the largest private timberland owner in this unit and they generally open most areas to motorized access from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

Upper elevations and those portions of this GMU in the upper Wynoochee River and Skokomish River Valleys are primarily USFS, with most areas open year round for vehicle access. Some USFS land is gated and closed to motorized access to minimize disturbance to elk.

### **GMU 651 (Satsop) – Access Rating: Good trending to Poor**

The primary area accessed by hunters is owned by [Green Diamond Resource Company](#). They generally open some gates to motorized access from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. Beginning in 2013, a large portion of their property in this GMU will require a recreation access permit. For more information, check the Green Diamond Resources [website](#) or (360) 427-4737. For other areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

## **PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM**

Hunters are encouraged to call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or periodically check for updated information on [WDFW's Hunter Access website](#) for the most current information on private lands access in District 15.

## **ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS**

Most GMUs in District 15 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. However, there are some online tools and resources that many hunters do not know about, but provide valuable information that helps solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources available to the general public.

### **Department of Natural Resources Public Lands Quadrangle (PLQ) Maps**

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands are DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website [here](#).

### **Online Parcel Databases**

Technology has come a long way and has made it much easier for the general public to identify tax parcel boundaries and the associated landowner. However, because this technology has not been readily available in the past, there are several hunters who are not aware it exists.

Parcel ownership can be accessed in all three counties in District 15 by going to their county assessor's webpage and viewing the parcel maps.

### **WDFW's Go Hunt Tool**

WDFW's GoHunt tool has been revamped and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The GoHunt tool can be accessed on WDFW's hunting website or by [clicking here](#).

### **Washington State Public Lands Inventory**

Provided by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, this online mapping tool displays public lands in Washington State. To access this map, go to Washington State Public Lands Inventory website.